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Factors affecting Job Satisfaction and Healthcare Services Quality in Healthcare Organizations

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Abstract

Internationally, successful organizations have been those that consider their human capital as their most important asset. Effective Human Resources Management practices have been pointed out internationally as an important element of service quality and customer satisfaction. Job satisfaction, stress and burnout are important human resource management aspects that modern organizations are faced with, forming an important element of employees' well-being in all organizations. The purpose of the present work was to investigate whether nurses would be less satisfied and more stressed when patients receive poor quality of service. Data analyzed in the present work were extracted from published reports for several hospitals from twelve different countries in Europe, Asia and USA. There was a large variability in working conditions and management practices in different countries. Nevertheless, nurses' job satisfaction can be a good indicator of patients' satisfaction. Nurses' and patients' perceptions for the quality of hospital care correlated, indicating that nurses do know well the quality of patient care their hospitals actually provide. A low level of job satisfaction is an expected outcome of low level of overall hospital care services. For this reason, initiatives to improve dimensions of health care services may improve both patients service quality and nurses job satisfaction with a positive net effect on overall improvement of patients care, nurses' job satisfaction and morale.

Keywords: human resources management, Nurses' and patients' perceptions

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1 Introduction

In healthcare, human resources management is a vital management task and modern healthcare organizations should make use of effective Human Resources Management practices in the development of employees and the organization in its entity, enabling the delivery of effective and efficient services [1, 2].

Exploring the relationship between employee and patient experiences in a hospital presents several benefits:

- Hospitals are large, diverse organizations with numerous departments that often dramatically differ from each other in size, function, and performance quality. This study uses department level data drawn from throughout the hospital.
- People - including nurses, administrators, physicians and staff - play a crucial role in the service delivery process. These individuals perform duties that directly and indirectly influence the quality of patient care and satisfaction. Nursing staff in particular are involved with patients on a daily, and sometimes hourly, basis.

2 The Role of Human Resources Management Practices to Organizational Performance and Success

Internationally, successful organizations have been those that consider their human capital as their most important asset [3].

Since the early 1990's, the positive relationship between *Human Resource Management (HRM)* practices and organizational performance has been emphasized in many research studies internationally [4-6]. This can be accounted to a shift, over the last two decades, of the role of Human Resources Management from a simply "supportive" role to a key element for the achievement of organizational goals and the organization's overall success [7-11].

The shift from *Personnel Management* to *Human Resource Management* that took place in the 1980s, marked the human-oriented view of organizations and the acknowledgment that employees are a valuable resource to the accomplishment of their mission and goals. Effective HRM policies have been pointed out as an important element of service quality and customer satisfaction [12]. An effective HRM policy includes a number of key *functions* which influence employee effectiveness and organizational performance [13, 14].

HRM consists of a variety of activities and functions. These functions aim at preventive (*proactive role*) issues related to human resources such as: workplace stress, bullying and harassment, workload and intensification of work. HRM functions include [11; 15-17]:

- human resources planning and resourcing,
- training and development,
- work evaluation,
- compensation and reward,
- maintenance and motivation,
- health and safety,
- employment relations.

In all types of industries, the level of human resources' *dedication, commitment* and *morale* has been an important indicator of an organization's performance. Empirical

analysis has shown that employees' *morale* can influence *consumer satisfaction* [18]. Within an organization, employees perform a wide range of important tasks; they set objectives and goals, control quality, design/produce goods and deliver services. An essential parameter in achieving the strategic aims of HRM is the way *service* is delivered [19] with the actions of the employees being a key factor for a high-quality delivery of *service* [20].

3 The Role of Satisfaction, Stress and Burnout in Employees' Well-being and Delivery of Services

Organizations that have goals to achieve require happy, motivated and satisfied employees [10; 21-22]. The task of all modern organizations is to analyze the factors that influence work performance, motivation and job satisfaction.

Job satisfaction can be defined as an affective or emotional state response towards various aspects of an employee's work. It can affect staff's enthusiasm and initiative and may influence various work aspects like: efficiency, productivity, absenteeism, turnover, employees' well-being [23-25].

Relevant studies [26-29] suggest that personal and organizational factors such as: gender, age, marital status, number of children, work experience, organizational structure, remuneration, work conditions, promotion prospects, leadership, group support, have important effects on job satisfaction.

Staff with high job satisfaction appear to have generally positive attitudes towards their work and vice versa [30]. Job satisfaction has a significant effect on staff's commitment to their organization, the quality and quality of their work, occupational accidents, absenteeism, tardiness rates and complaints [31-32].

There is a variety of reasons that an employee can become discouraged with his/her job, including: lack/bad of communication and recognition for the quality of their performance, limited opportunities for growth and high *work related stress*.

Stress is one of the main causes of staff's dissatisfaction with their work, having a negative impact on individual as well as organizational level. At individual level, work related stress is associated with low job satisfaction, burnout, physical, behavioral and mental health effects [33]. At an organizational level, work stress has been associated to: high absenteeism, labor turnover, poor performance, poor/low productivity, low motivation, low morale, increased employee complaints and work accidents [43, 35]. Possible stressors contributing to work stress include: heavy workloads, high job demands, poor or inadequate supervision, staff issues, working under dangerous conditions, conflict with peers, lack of support, insecurity, risk of work termination [36-37].

Excessive and prolonged stress may lead to *job/occupational burnout*. *Burnout* syndrome is the emotional, mental and physical exhaustion and is frequently used to describe a situation similar to the *putting out of a candle* and comprises three components: *emotional exhaustion*, *depersonalization* and *lack of personal accomplishment/achievement* [38-40]. It is associated with low productivity, absenteeism, work turnover, low morale, lack of enthusiasm, feeling of ineffectiveness, loss of motivation and low job satisfaction [41-42].

Job burnout can be a result of various factors, including: heavy workload, lack of resources, unclear job expectations, lack /poor peer and management support, work-life

imbalance. It is particularly found in human services field and in professions like: social workers, teachers, physicians, police officers, nurses [43]. Nurses are playing a significant role in cost restriction since they constitute the front-line professional staff in a hospital [44]. In the healthcare sector, the interaction between patients and healthcare employees is an integral component of the service process [45].

Hospitals all over the world, frequently struggle with limited resources to offer high quality of care to their patients and good working conditions to their staff. It would be reasonable to assume that nurses would be less satisfied and possibly more stressed if their patients receive poor quality of services.

The purpose of the present work was to investigate the above hypothesis using recently published data from different countries.

4 Critical Human Resources Management Parameters in Healthcare Organizations

The current global financial crisis has put more pressure on health care systems throughout the world with hospitals facing many challenges: increased costs, decreased budgets, closures of medical units, healthcare staff shortages, staff and salary reductions and layoffs and increased demand for better service quality.

During the last years, an increase in health employees' dissatisfaction and burn out has been experienced at an international level.

Negative workplace environment due to cost containment strategies, diminishing resources, understaffed hospitals, increasing staff responsibilities and intensive workloads, result in dissatisfied, highly stressed, burned out nurses who often report their willingness to leave their current positions or get an early retirement whenever possible [33; 46-47].

Over the past decades, the role of effective human resources management to the success of health care system performance [4] was not given adequate attention. Nowadays, the importance of HRM to the effective running of health care organizations has been pointed out through various studies that have positively connected good HRM practices with the development of quality of healthcare service and the achievement of good health results [48-49].

Relevant literature has shown that providing motivation and incentives to hospital staff can improve their performance and can actually make a difference between a healthcare organization having a good performance and an underperformed one [50]. Healthcare professionals' satisfaction has been linked with retention, patient satisfaction and quality of healthcare [51-53].

Healthcare organizations make use of appropriate management policies and practices so as to maximize their health system performance and effectiveness [48]. The use of effective HR practices is related to improved [54]:

- *financial outcomes*, such as profits and market share,
- *organizational outcomes*, like productivity and quality and *customer* satisfaction, and
- *human resources outcomes*, such as employees' attitudes and behavior.

One important area of improving and maintaining service delivery is to better manage the HR function. Good work environment, work satisfaction and assurance are integral parts of hospital management.

5 Methodology

Published data were used to collect indices of nurse's burnout, dissatisfaction and patient satisfaction. The data analyzed in the present work were extracted from published reports for several hospitals from twelve different countries in Europe [47] Asia and the USA [55]. These published papers employed similar methodology for estimating nurses' dissatisfaction and patients' satisfaction and the results could be easily pooled together for analysis.

The percentage of nurses who considered themselves as *burnout* or *dissatisfied* with their job (overall job dissatisfaction) and the percentage of patients which rated their overall hospital care service with a grade above 9/10 were used to investigate the effect of job dissatisfaction on patient satisfaction.

The possible effect of nurses' occupational burnout/job dissatisfaction on patients' satisfaction was investigated. If it is assumed that nurses' high dissatisfaction would not have a positive effect on patients' satisfaction, then a one tailed statistical test may be used in the effort to detect possible effect of nurses on patients using small number of data [56]. Data was analyzed using Kendall's correlation coefficient to explore a possible relationship between the parameters [57]. P-values for the effect of nurses burnout and job satisfaction are reported one-tailed due to specific hypotheses [58] as a more powerful method to evaluate the possible influence of nurses job dissatisfaction on patients satisfaction.

6 Results

Data analysis indicates that the correlation between nurses' occupational burnout and patients' satisfaction was not statistically significant (Figure 1a).

There was a significant correlation between nurses' job satisfaction and patients' satisfaction (Figure 1b) with a significant correlation between the perceptions of nurses and patients for the quality of hospital care (Figure 2).

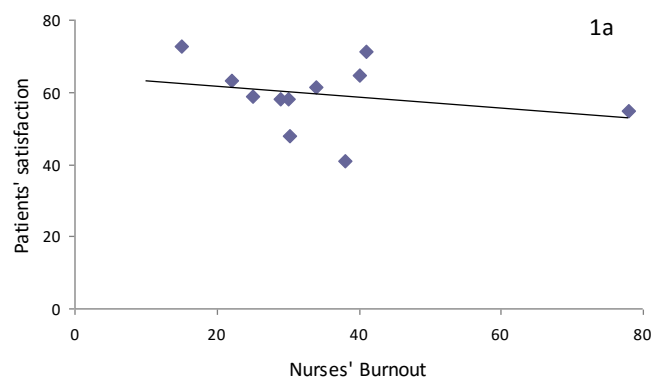


Figure 1a: Plot of burnout and patients' satisfaction. Data were extracted from published reports from different countries [47, 55].

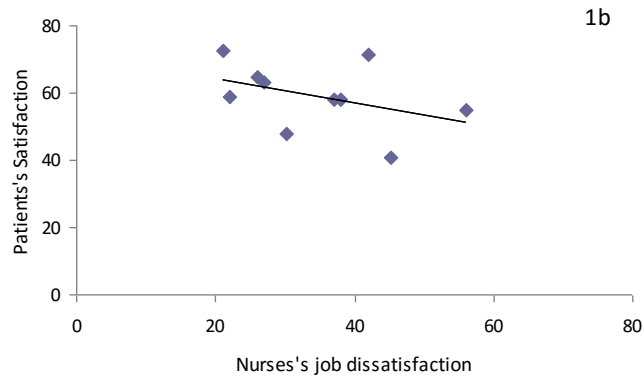


Figure 1b: Plot of dissatisfaction and patients' satisfaction. Data were extracted from published reports from different countries [47, 55].

A significant negative correlation between nurses job dissatisfaction and patients satisfaction was observed (Kendall's correlation coefficient $r = -0.59$, $P = 0.034$, one tailed). A negative correlation (Kendall's correlation coefficient $r = -0.753$, $P = 0.011$, two tailed) between Nurses' and patients' perceptions for the quality of hospital care in Hospitals in different countries.

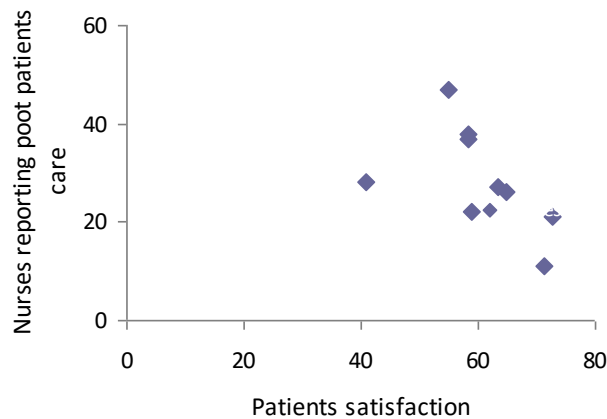


Figure 2: A significant correlation between the perceptions of nurses and patients for the quality of hospital care. Data were calculated from average values from published reports from different countries [47, 55].

The data presented in Figures 1a&b indicate a tendency of lower patient satisfaction in hospitals where nurses exhibit increased professional burnout or job dissatisfaction. Nevertheless, this negative relationship was not significant in the case of nurses' burnout and patients' satisfaction ($P > 0.05$) but a significant relationship was observed between nurses' job dissatisfaction and patient satisfaction ($P = 0.034$, Spearman $r = -0.59$).

Nurses' and patients' views coincide well in terms of the level of quality of care offered in hospitals. In fact, there was a significant correlation between nurses' and patients' reports on pure quality services offered in some hospitals (Fig. 2).

There are several intrinsic and extrinsic factors that can influence occupational burnout and job satisfaction of nurses. For example, personality traits, work experience, training, workload, working conditions and managerial support have a significant effect on job satisfaction [57, 59].

Furthermore, several dimensions of hospital care can influence patient satisfaction [60-62].

Data analyzed in the present work were extracted from published reports of several hospitals from twelve different countries in Europe [47], Asia and USA [55].

It can be assumed that several parameters would vary dramatically between different hospitals and countries resulting in a wide range of several parameters which may influence patient satisfaction. For example, nurses' job satisfaction and "professional depression" can also be influenced by a range of parameters including workload, role ambiguity and perceived support from the management [44].

Emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of nurses often lead dissatisfied and burned out nurses leaving their position [63].

In spite of a large variability in traits of nurses, patients characteristics and hospital care dimension, a strong effect of nurses job burnout and job satisfaction on patients' satisfaction is frequently observed, indicating the significant role of nursing for the patients [57, 64].

Nurses' professional performance may not be the sole contributor of patients satisfaction but the data analyzed in the present work indicate that patients were less likely to be satisfied when hospitalized in hospitals where nurses exhibited increased level of perceived job dissatisfaction.

This information can be used in proactive management actions and the decrease in patients' satisfaction levels may serve as general "alert" hospital management generating initiatives for improvement such as human resources management of healthcare staff.

7 Discussion

The results presented in the present work indicate that in spite of the large variability in work conditions and management practices in different countries, nurses' job satisfaction can be a good indicator of patients' satisfaction. Nurses' and patients' perceptions for the quality of hospital care correlated, indicating that nurses do know well the health care quality of patient care their hospitals actually provide.

A low level of job satisfaction is an "expected" outcome of low level of overall hospital care services. For this reason, initiatives to improve hospital services dimensions may improve both patients' service quality and nurses' job satisfaction with a positive net effect on overall improvement of patients' care, nurses' job satisfaction and morale.

Nowadays, quality management and service is a challenge modern organizations worldwide. To achieve this, organizations should introduce policies that promote healthy work conditions which prevent and protect employees from work-related stress and burnout.

Important elements in improving service quality [65] include:

(i) The adoption of effective human resources management policies and practices so as to

ensure employees' satisfaction. Management support and a good work environment play an important role in enabling employees to provide high quality service.

(ii) The organization has to implement its values, policies and procedures to leverage the delivery of high service quality.

In healthcare, human resources management is a vital management task and modern healthcare organizations should make use of effective HRM practices in the development of employees and the organization in its entity, enabling the delivery of effective and efficient services [1, 2].

In this direction, they can employ tools such as: continual professional training and development, staff empowerment, creation of positive work climate, encouragement, recognition by managers and appreciation by peers and patients for the work delivered, can positively influence satisfaction, retention and the quality of service delivery [66, 67]. When organizations foster and encourage relationships with their employees and provide a supportive working environment, the result can lead to improved customer services provision [68]. Good interpersonal relationships and teamwork between healthcare professionals affects positively patients' outcomes [69].

The adoption of a transformational leadership style, can help in developing collaboration between healthcare professionals, enhance nurses' satisfaction and performance [44, 66, 70] and reduces their possibility to experience occupational burnout or leave the profession [71].

Modern organizations, require happy, motivated and satisfied human resources and is the task of the organizations to analyze the factors that influence their employees' motivation, job satisfaction and work performance.

Happiness in the workplace leads to higher levels of productivity, increases employee morale making people more willing to work harder for the improvement of their organization, its mission and goals.

This is even more important in the international economic downturn like the current one, where organizations, in their effort to financially survive, often "tend" to forget the actual costs associated with unhappy, dissatisfied and stressed employees.

During the current financial hardship where financial resources are minimal, the provision of *non-financial* incentives can play an important part in helping healthcare staff to feel appreciated and valued.

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